

A new site for Newton's Fiscal *Lanius newtoni*

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Cette note relate d'une prospection réalisée entre le 8 et le 13 juillet dans une zone de forêt primaire située à l'ouest du Rio Ió Grande, dans le sud-est de l'île de São Tomé. Il semble qu'il s'agisse de la première prospection ornithologique dans cette région. Les observations étaient à la hauteur de toutes les espérances. En effet, la plupart des endémiques à l'île ont été trouvés, notamment le Nasique de Bocage *Amaurocichla bocagei*, l'Ibis de Bocage *Bostrychia olivacea bocagei* et la Pie-grièche de São Tomé *Lanius newtoni*. Cette dernière a été, apparemment pour la première fois, photographiée sur le terrain. Une description des oiseaux observés est donnée, ainsi que de leur vocalisation et de leur comportement. On notera en particulier que cette espèce a la queue clairement échancrée, fait unique parmi les *Lanius*. Enfin, une observation, malheureusement trop brève et dans de mauvaises conditions, du Neospize de Sao Tome, a été réalisée par un des observateurs.

Between 8 and 13 July 1999, we conducted a five-day survey of an area of primary forest west of the rio Ió Grande (00°08'N 06°37'W), in south-east São Tomé. According to Jacques Rosseel (ECOFAC), who had visited the area east of the river, this previously unexplored area appeared excellent and he recommended that we visit it. The altitude varies from 60 to 214 m. Two small tributaries of the rio Ió Grande, namely the rios Miranda Guedes and João, flow through the area.

Our main purpose was to find the rarest and most localised island endemics: Dwarf Olive Ibis *Bostrychia olivacea bocagei*, São Tomé Short-tail (Bocage's Longbill) *Amaurocichla bocagei*, Newton's (São Tomé) Fiscal *Lanius newtoni* and São Tomé Grosbeak *Neospiza concolor*.

With the help of our ECOFAC guide, Pedro Letão, Benoît Forget and (for the last two days) Josep del Hoyo, we found almost all of these. Dwarf Olive Ibis and São Tomé Short-tail proved relatively easy to find, the latter along the smallest rivers and forested foothills. Of São Tomé Grosbeak, however, only brief and unsatisfactory views were obtained by one of us: what was thought to be this species was first seen in flight and subsequently in dense, dark undergrowth, along the rio João. This does not permit confirmation of the presence of this rare species in the area.

For Newton's Fiscal, excellent sight records and good tape-recordings were obtained. We found a total of five individuals at three different locations, all along the ridge west of the rio Ió Grande. The first was at 210 m, just south of the rio Miranda Guedes, the two others at 180 m, between the rios Miranda Guedes and João. GW photographed two individuals, apparently the first field photographs of the species.

The following notes were taken in the field. A very slim shrike, the size of a Common Fiscal *Lanius*



Figure 1. Habitat of Newton's Fiscal *Lanius newtoni*, in south-east São Tomé (Gilles Willem)



Figure 2. Newton's Fiscal *Lanius newtoni*, south-east São Tomé (Gilles Willem)

collaris, with a relatively thin, long bill and long legs. Primary projection appeared quite short. Head and bill shapes recalled those of a small bush-shrike *Telophorus* spp. Crown, upperparts and tail black except for a white panel on the scapulars and grey patch at the base of the primaries. The underparts, from chin to lower belly, were yellow. Undertail-coverts dark grey with white tips. Tail graduated, with rounded rectrices, and appeared clearly forked in all individuals, most unusually for a shrike. This is not mentioned in most of the recent literature^{2,3}, but was also noticed by Sargeant¹, who considered it reminiscent of Asian forktails *Enicurus* spp. and wondered whether this was a result of moult.

One individual (which was photographed) was slightly duller, particularly on the underparts, with the white panel on the scapulars a little dirty and the undertail-coverts less contrasting. This may have been an immature plumage, or due to slight sexual dimorphism.

The song consisted of a long series of quite short, monosyllabic, fluted *tiu* notes. A tape-recording comprises an uninterrupted series of 59 *tiu* notes lasting 1 min and 14 seconds. The longest series lasted 2 min and 21 sec. We also heard a much faster and higher pitched *tee-tee-tee*, and an alarm call that could be described as a fast series of short *tchick* notes.

All individuals appeared nervous and shy, constantly moving and not remaining for more than a few seconds on the same branch. Both when perching and on the ground (where only one was seen) they moved the tail, wings or head in the manner of some *Turdidae* spp, and appeared obviously disturbed by our presence.

These are the first sightings of Newton's Fiscal in the south-east of the island. The species' range is still imperfectly known. Since its rediscovery, in 1990, it has been recorded in primary lowland forest, up to 700 m, along the rios São Miguel, Xufexufe and Quija in the south-west, and in the north-east of the main forest block, west of Bombain. There is also an unconfirmed report from the environs of Estação Sousa, just south of Pico de São Tomé¹⁻³ (J Rosseel pers comm).

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